
CANCER FACTS

National Cancer Institute • National Institutes of Health

More Choices in Cancer Care: Information for Beneficiaries on Medicare Coverage of Cancer Clinical Trials

Medicare¹ now offers beneficiaries more choices in their cancer care by reimbursing patient care costs in clinical trials. While beneficiaries have Medicare coverage for standard cancer care, they now also have coverage for participating in clinical trials for the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

1. What is a clinical trial?

A clinical trial is a research study conducted with people. Treatment trials answer specific questions about new ways to improve medical care. The result of such research is that many people with cancer are surviving and living longer, more comfortable lives.

2. Why are clinical trials conducted?

Clinical trials are conducted with patients to find out whether promising treatments are safe and more effective than those already available. Cancer clinical trials help doctors and researchers find better ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat cancer.

3. Why do people consider participating in a clinical trial?

Reasons to consider a cancer clinical trial include:

- Chance to be among the first to benefit from new treatments;
- Gain access to promising, new treatments that are not widely available;
- Obtain high quality care from doctors who are cancer specialists;
- Help future patients with the same types of cancer.

¹ Medicare is a Federal health insurance program administered by the Health Care Financing Administration. Eligible individuals include those who are 65 or older, people of any age with permanent kidney failure, and some disabled people under age 65.

4. Why don't people participate in clinical trials?

- New drugs or procedures may have unknown side effects or risks.
- Even if a new cancer treatment looks promising, it may be less effective than standard care.
- The trial may require more visits to the doctor than standard care.
- People may not be aware that Medicare provides coverage for clinical trials.
- Patients or their doctors may not be aware that a cancer trial might be a treatment option for their type of cancer.

5. Should I take part in a clinical trial?

Only you can make this decision after your doctor has given you all of the facts. An informed consent process is required, which can provide you with information to help you make educated decisions about whether or not to begin or continue participating in a trial.

Medicare Coverage of Clinical Trials

6. If I am in a clinical trial, what will Medicare pay?

Any cancer care normally covered by Medicare is also covered when it is part of a clinical trial. This may include:

- Routine tests, procedures, and doctor visits;
- Services or items usually associated with the experimental treatment, such as costs to administer investigational drugs;
- Health care associated with being in a clinical trial, such as a test or hospitalization due to an unanticipated side effect.

7. What costs are not covered?

- Investigational drugs, items, or services being tested in a trial.
- Items or services used solely for the data collection needs of the trial.
- Anything being provided free by the sponsor of the trial.
- Any coinsurance and deductibles.

8. What kinds of clinical trials are covered?

Cancer clinical trials are covered if:

- They are funded by the National Cancer Institute (NCI), NCI-Designated Cancer Centers, NCI-Sponsored Clinical Trials Cooperative Groups, or another Federal agency that funds cancer research;

- They are designed to treat or diagnose cancer;
- The purpose or subject of the trial is within a Medicare benefit category. For example, cancer diagnosis and treatment are Medicare benefits, so these trials are covered. Cancer prevention trials are not currently covered.

If your trial is not described above, or if you are not sure whether your trial meets all of the requirements, discuss these concerns with your doctor or call the Medicare information number. Other trials may be covered, so ask about these trials before you begin participating in a clinical trial that is not covered.

How To Learn More

9. How can I learn more about cancer clinical trials?

Discuss this option with your doctor and refer to these resources from the National Cancer Institute (NCI):

Over the Internet:

- The NCI's cancerTrials™ Web site (<http://cancertrials.nci.nih.gov>) lists trials for patients with cancer and includes in-depth information about cancer clinical trials;
- CancerNet™ (<http://cancernet.nci.nih.gov>) provides information on most types of cancer. The Web site's content is reviewed and updated by expert cancer specialists;
- If you do not have access to a personal computer, your local library or senior center may be able to help you find this information.

Over the Phone:

- Call the NCI's toll-free Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237) for cancer information and help locating cancer clinical trials. If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call the TTY number toll-free at 1-800-332-8615.

10. How can I learn more about what Medicare covers?

Over the Internet:

- Medicare's Clinical Trials Quick Reference Guide (<http://www.hcfa.gov/coverage/8d.htm>) has answers to the most frequently asked questions;
- The official U.S. Government Web site for Medicare (<http://www.medicare.gov>) contains enrollment and general information.

Over the Phone:

- 1-800-MEDICARE (1-800-633-4227), Medicare's toll-free number for beneficiaries, offers information about benefits. If you are hearing or speech impaired, call the TTY/TDD line toll-free at 1-877-486-2048.

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Sources of National Cancer Institute Information

Cancer Information Service

Toll-free: 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237)

TTY (for deaf and hard of hearing callers): 1-800-332-8615

NCI Online

Internet

Use <http://cancer.gov> to reach NCI's Web site.

CancerMail Service

To obtain a contents list, send e-mail to cancermail@cips.nci.nih.gov with the word "help" in the body of the message.

CancerFax® fax on demand service

Dial 1-800-624-2511 or 301-402-5874 and follow the voice-prompt instructions.

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